

*Judgment, Mercy and Fidelity, the weigh-
tier Matters, or Duties of the Law.*

A 2
S E R M O N

Preached at

St. HELLEN'S Church in *Abington*,
July 18. 1727.

At the Assizes held there
for the County of *Berks*,

Before the Honourable
Mr. Justice PAGE, and Mr. Justice
REYNOLDS.

By *FRANCIS FOX*, M. A.
Vicar of *St. Maries* in *Reading*, and Pre-
bendary of *Salisbury*.

L O N D O N:

Printed by JOSEPH DOWNING, in *Bartholomew-Close*,
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WESTLEY, in *Reading, Berks.* M.DCC.XXVII.



T O T H E

Right Honourable

Peter Lord King,

Baron of Ockham,

A N D

Lord High Chancellor

O F

GREAT BRITAIN;

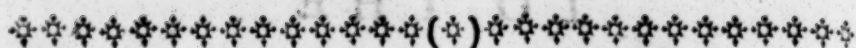
The following Sermon is most humbly
Dedicated, as a publick Testimony of
the sincerest Gratitude, by his Lord-
ship's

Most Oblig'd,

most Obedient, and

most humble Servant,

E. Fox,



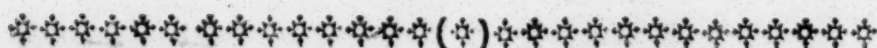
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MATT. xxiii. 23.

Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye pay Tithe of Mint, and Anise, and Cummin, and have omitted the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy and Faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.



THE Business of an *Affize* being to hear and determine *Causes*, respecting the Rights and Properties, the Lives and Liberties of Men; and a due Regard to *Justice*, *Mercy* and *Fidelity*, being in an especial manner necessary in all such Determinations, I could not think of any Text more suitable to the present Occasion.

In this, and the following Verses, our Lord accuses the Scribes and Pharisees of great Hypocrisie, telling them in Effect, that provided they could but make a *fair Appearance* before Men, they had little or no Regard to the *inward Temper* of their Minds,

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Minds, nor whether their Hearts were *pure* or *not pure*; that they were very scrupulous about things of *lesser Moment*, and at the same time ventured on the Commission of the most gross and most abominable Sins. Ceremonies and positive Institutions they were very fond of, and they took great Pains, and used much Diligence about them; but that which God *principally* required, that for the Sake of which Ceremonies, and all the *external Duties* of Religion, were commanded, namely, the *Moral* and *substantial Parts* of Religion; these they took little care of. For this their great *Hypocrisy* our Lord in the Text denounces a severe *Wo* against them. *Wo unto you Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye pay Tithe of Mint, and Anise, and Cummin, and have omitted the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy and Faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* Our Blessed Saviour did not condemn them for *Tithing Mint, and Anise, and Cummin*, nor for observing any, even the *smallest Point* of *instituted Religion*; no, on the contrary, He tells them *they ought so to do*; consequently they did well in doing thereof. What our Lord condemn'd them for was, their *resting* in these *outward Duties*, and laying a *greater Stress* on the Practice of them, than the Nature of them would admit,

the *weightier Matters* of the Law. 7

admit, and *preferring* them before the *moral* and *substantial* Duties of Religion, which are of natural and eternal Obligation.

In discoursing of this Subject, I shall enquire,

First, What those Duties are, which we may call the *less weighty Matters* of the Law.

Secondly, What those Duties are, which our Lord here styles *the weightier Matters* of the Law.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour, by the most powerful Motives I can think of, to prevail with you seriously to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law, as well as those of *less Moment* and *Concern*.

First, I shall enquire what those Duties are, which we may call the *less weighty Matters* of the Law. For our Blessed Saviour speaking in the Text of the *weightier Matters* or Duties of the Law, that plainly supposes that there are some Duties required by God, which are of *less Weight* and *Moment*; and which, though we ought not to despise or neglect them, yet much *less Stress* is to be laid upon them than upon the *weightier Matters* of the Law. Among the *Jews*, the Precepts respecting the Ceremonies
and

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and Sacrifices appointed in the Law of *Moses* are of this Sort. In like Manner, the Precept of the Sabbath, and in general all the instrumental Duties of Religion, may be stiled the *less weighty Matters* of the Law. For there may be Reasons which will justify a Person before God and Man, for omitting to offer Sacrifice, or for doing some servile and laborious Work on the Sabbath-Day; but no Reason can be assign'd, which will justify or excuse a Person for Oppression, or being unjust, cruel, or unmerciful. The Laws therefore of Justice, of Mercy, and of Charity, are *greater and weightier* than those which command Duties of positive Institution, which have no intrinsic Goodness in them. With Respect to us Christians, the *less weighty Matters* of the Law of God are such as these; Prayer, Fasting, hearing the Word of God, receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's-Supper, reading the Scriptures, Meditation, and all other circumstantial Parts and Duties of Religion. These indeed are Duties not to be carelessly neglected, much less should they be despised by us; if they be, we sin against God, who has commanded us to practise them. But we lie under a great and a dangerous Mistake, if we imagine, that when we have perform'd these Duties, we have done all that God requires; or if we think

the *weightier Matters* of the *Law*. 9

think the Practice of these Duties sufficient to denominate us good Men, and good Christians, and to gain us Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven. For our Redeemer has assured us in Words too plain to be mistaken and misunderstood, that, whatever Pretensions Men may make, *he will bid the Workers of Iniquity to depart from him*; and that *except we be born of Water, and of the Spirit, except we be converted, and become as little Children, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

If we consider the Nature and End of the instrumental Duties of Religion, those I mean, which are only of positive Institution, we shall find that they have only a relative Goodness in them; they were not commanded by God because they are good, but they are good because they are commanded. And they are commanded, not for any intrinsic Excellency there is in them absolutely considered, but because they are, or may, at least they ought to be, subservient to engage and prevail with us to practise those Duties, which have a natural and moral Goodness in them, and which we should have been oblig'd to practise, although God had never given us any Revelation of his Will in the Holy Scriptures. And this brings me to enquire,

B

Secondly,

Secondly, What those Duties are which our Lord here stiles the *weightier Matters* of the Law ; for the Neglect of which, he denounces a Wo against the Scribes and Pharisees. *Wo unto you Scribes, Pharisees, and Hypocrites ; for ye pay Tithe, &c.* Now what these Duties are, we may learn from the Instances mentioned by our Blessed Saviour in the Text, which are *Judgment, Mercy, and Faith, or Fidelity* ; Duties of a moral Nature, and perpetual Obligation ; Duties which no Man or Body of Men can without Guilt depart from, or give a Dispensation to any others, sufficient to excuse before God their not complying with them.

Both the Law of Nature, and the Law of Revelation, enjoin the Practice of all moral Duties ; by which I understand all those Duties, which arise from the Consideration of the Reason and Nature of Things, of our selves, and the Relations we are in, and the Attributes and Perfections of God ; as that we love God and one another, that we do no Injury to any one, and that we be always ready to do all the good we can, &c.

Now it is usual in Holy Writ to express these Duties by one or more general Words, which include under them all the rest. Thus in the Prophecy of *Micah*, Chap. 6. 8. the *Prophet* having in the
Verses

the *weightier Matters* of the *Law*. II

Verſes before, introduc'd one enquiring what *Method* he muſt take to pleaſe God, and to recommend himſelf to his Favour; Whether this might be done by *making large Offerings*, and *Burnt-offerings*? The Answer given to this Queſtion is, in Effect, No; this was not the only Way to pleaſe God. There was ſomething more required. For *he hath ſhewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Our Bleſſed Lord reduces the *weightier Matters* of the *Law* to theſe two Heads, *Matt. 22. 37, &c.* the *Love of God*, and the *Love of our Neighbour*; telling us, that the *Summ and Subſtance* of the *Moral Law* is comprehended under theſe two Precepts. *St. Paul, Tit. 2. 11, 12.* ſpeaking of the Deſign of the Goſpel, reduces the *great Points* of Religion to theſe Heads, *That Men deny all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and that they live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the preſent World.* And in the Text, our Lord reduces the *weightier Matters* of the *Law* to *Judgment, Mercy, and Faith, or Fidelity.* The Scribes and Pharifees probably were Judges in ſome Caſes, and had the Execution of the Laws committed to them; and it is not unlikely, but that they ſuffer'd themſelves to be prevailed with, by the Conſiderations of

Friendship, Relation, and other corrupt Motives, to give partial and wrong Judgments in the Causes that came before them; which may be the Reason why our Lord here particularly mentions Judgment. *Judgment* too may include all Acts of *Justice*, as *Mercy* does every Act of Kindness, Beneficence and Charity, all that good which we are capable of doing to the Souls and Bodies of Men. Some interpret *Faith* to signifie *Fidelity*, and then it implies *Faithfulness* in making and performing all our Agreements and Contracts, that we are true to our Word and Promises, &c. It is most certain, that by the *weightier Matters* of the Law, we are to understand all those Duties which are of natural and moral Obligation, respecting God, our Neighbour, and our selves; that we love God above all things, fear his Threatnings, trust in his Providence, and hope in his Promises; that we imitate him in all his imitable Perfections, his Justice, his Holiness, his Truth, his Goodness, his Mercy, &c. With Respect to our Neighbour, *Righteousness* or Justice is of a much larger Extent, than it is, I doubt, commonly thought to be; for it includes not only Honesty and Uprightness in our Dealings, in Opposition to Deceit and Fraud, Truth and Fidelity, in Opposition to Lying, Falshood, and Breach of our Word and Pro-

the *weightier Matters* of the *Law*. 13

Promises; but it takes in likewise all those Duties, which are incumbent upon us in our respective Stations and Relations; as Magistrates or Subjects, as Ministers or People, as Husbands or Wives, as Parents or Children, as Masters or Servants, or in whatever other Capacity we may consider our selves. For the Duties arising from the different Relations and Circumstances People are in, are Duties required by the great Law of Justice.

In few Words, the Apostle has summ'd up the *weightier Matters* of the Law, in those comprehensive Words, *Phil. 4. 8.* where he requires us to think of and practise. *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.*

One thing I would observe, before I dismiss this Head; namely, when the Practice of these Duties flows from a Principle of Love and Obedience to God, when they proceed from that new Nature which the Gospel was design'd to beget in us, they are properly Christian Vertues, and as such rewardable by God; but if in doing them we intend nothing more than to gain a Reputation, or promote our own **E**ase, and Convenience, or Interest, in this World, they are not Christian
Ver-

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Vertues, nor rewardable by God ; for we cannot reasonably hope to receive a Reward from God for doing what was never done for his Sake, nor in Obedience to him, but only to serve and please our selves.

But alas ! these Duties are much better known than practised ; at least, People may know them if they will ; for they are manifest not only by the Light of Nature, but by the revealed Will of God in the Holy Scriptures ; not to insist on the Motions of the Holy Spirit of God, who suggests these Things to the Minds of Men, tho' we cannot always distinguish the Motions and Operations of the Holy Spirit from the workings of our own Minds.

But tho' these Duties are known, it is notwithstanding evident, that People are very defective in the Practice of them ; it shall be my Business therefore in the

Third Place, by the most powerful Motives I can think of, to prevail with you seriously to set about the Practice of these Duties which are the *weightier Matters* of the Law, as well as those which are of *less Moment and Concern*. And,

First, If we neglect to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law, no other Service that we perform will be acceptable and pleasing to God.

Secondly,

the *weightier Matters* of the *Law*. 15

Secondly, By the Practice thereof, we resemble and imitate God.

Thirdly, The Practice of these Duties renders us dear to, and beloved by God.

First, If we neglect to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law, no other Service that we perform will be acceptable and pleasing to God. If we study the Holy Scriptures with the greatest Care and Diligence, and are never so exact and critical in the Knowledge of them; tho' we should fast and pray often, and diligently hear the Word of God, and take every Opportunity of receiving the Holy Sacrament, and that with the greatest seeming Devotion; yet if our Souls are unholy and impure; if we be destitute of the Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour; if we neglect the Duties of our respective Places and Stations; if we be proud, conceited, censorious, and full of Malice and Envy; if we detract from our Neighbours just Worth, or by *Slander* and *Evil-speaking* rob him of his Reputation and *good Name*, which is more valuable, and *rather to be chosen than great Riches*; if we dishonour the Name of God by profane Swearing and Cursing, or bind our Souls by solemn Oaths, and notwithstanding are unmindful of the Obligations they lay upon us; if we live in Gluttony and Drunkenness, are deceitful

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ceitful and false, base and treacherous; in few Words, if we allow our selves in any of these or such like Sins, what does all our Zeal for the circumstantial and outward Part of Religion, all our Knowledge, all our Prayers, all the Sacraments we partake of, profit us, what good do they do us? When Hypocrisy is discovered, and laid open before Men, it renders the guilty the just Objects of Contempt and Scorn. And with Respect to God, from whose all-seeing Eye nothing can be hid, the Reason of our own Minds would tell us, were the Scriptures wholly silent in the Case, that the Services of those who are disobedient to his Laws, are so far from being acceptable, that they are an Abomination to him. For nothing short of a sincere and hearty Resolution to obey his wise and righteous Laws, can give us Hopes of being accepted by him. Prayers and Sacraments, and all other Means of Grace, are not required for their own Sakes, or by Reason of any Vertue and Holiness there is in them, absolutely considered; but they are relative Duties, appointed by God, for a higher and nobler End; namely, to beget in us a Likeness and Resemblance of himself, *to make us Partakers of a divine Nature, and fruitful in all good Works; that we may abound in all the Works of Righteousness,*
which

which are by Jesus Christ to the Praise and Glory of God; and that we may, as soon as possible, become *sincerely Righteous and Holy*, as God is *infinitely pure and Holy*. I might confirm this by citing^a numerous Texts from the Old and New Testament; but I persuade my self this cannot be necessary before a Christian Congregation, who have the Holy Scriptures in a Language they understand; because many Places of Scripture, as I have been speaking, must have occur'd, to establish them in the Belief of this important

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^a Among the many Texts, reducible to this Head, the following deserve a particular Attention.

" 1 Sam. 15. 22. Hath the Lord as great *Delight* in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in *obeying the Voice of the Lord*? Behold, to *obey is better than Sacrifice*; and to hearken than the Fat of Rams.

" Prov. 15. 8. The Sacrifice of the *wicked is Abomination* to the Lord: but the *Prayer of the Upright* is his Delight. See likewise Isa. 1. ver. 11, to Verse 17.

" Matt. 5. 20. I say unto you, That except your *Righteousness shall exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, ye shall in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

" Matt. 9. 13. Go ye, and learn what this meaneth, I will have *Mercy*, and *not Sacrifice*.

" Rom. 2. 28, 29. He is not a *Jew* which is *one outwardly*; neither is that *Circumcision* which is *outward* in the Flesh: But he is a *Jew* which is *one inwardly*; and *Circumcision* is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.

" 1 Cor. 7. 19. *Circumcision is nothing*, and *Uncircumcision is nothing*, but the *keeping the Commandments of God*. See Gal. 5. 6. Gal. 6. 15.

portant Truth. There is another Reason too, why this is not necessary, because what I have said, like a *first Principle*, carries its own Evidence along with it; namely, that unless we forsake our Sins, and amend our Ways, and our Doings, no Service we can perform is acceptable and pleasing to God.

A second Motive to prevail with you to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law is, that by so doing we resemble and imitate God. Both Reason and Revelation conspire to give us this Notion of God, that he is a holy, good, just, and merciful Being; all therefore who would truly resemble and imitate God, must become holy, good, just, merciful, &c. otherwise they cannot be like unto him; and if we be not like God, we can never be happy in the Enjoyment of him. We are therefore in the Holy Scriptures exhorted, urged, and pressed to labour after a *Resemblance* to God; and this is used as an Argument to prevail with us to practise the great and substantial Duties of Religion, that by so doing, we shall be the *Children* of our Heavenly Father. Accordingly we may observe, that our Blessed Lord, having in his *Divine Sermon* on the Mount, delivered some of the most exalted Precepts and Duties of his Religion, as *Purity of Heart, hungering and thirsting after Righteousness, loving of Enemies, and*
doing

doing good to those who hate us; He in-
forces the Practice of them by this very
Argument, *Matt. 5. 45. That ye may be
the Children of your Father which is in
Heaven; for he maketh the Sun to rise on
the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain
on the just, and on the unjust; adding,
ver. 48. Be ye therefore perfect, as your
Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* In
like manner, *St. Paul* having in the Con-
clusion of the 4th Chapter of his Epistle to
the *Ephesians*, exhorted them to put away
all Bitterness, Wrath, and Anger, and Cla-
mour, and Evil-speaking, with all Malice;
and to be kind one to another, tender-heart-
ed, forgiving one another, even as God for
Christ's Sake had forgiven them; he in-
forces the Practice of these Duties in the
Beginning of the 5th Chapter, telling
them that hereby they would be Followers
and Imitators of God: *Be ye therefore
Followers of God, as dear Children, and
walk in Love, as Christ also hath loved us.*
That by practising the moral and substan-
tial Duties of Religion, we resemble and
imitate God; I will only farther add
the Testimony of *St. Peter*, 1 Ep. 1. 14,
15. *As obedient Children*, says he, not fa-
shioning your selves according to the former
Lusts in your Ignorance: But as he which
hath called you is Holy, so be ye Holy in all
manner of Conversation; because it is writ-
ten, *Be ye Holy, for I am Holy.*

Thirdly, To prevail with you to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law, let it be considered, that this renders us dear to God, and beloved by him. I might make this manifest from the Promises made to righteous and good Men, as that the *pure in Heart shall see God*, and from several other Places in Holy Scripture. But if, as was shewn in speaking to the former Motive, true and substantial Holiness renders us like him, we may be assured that God cannot but love his own Image. The more therefore any one resembles God, the more will he be beloved by him. And if we consult the Holy Scriptures, we shall find, that those that are distinguished by the particular Favours they received from God, the *Character* and *Description* given of them, is for the most Part made up of one or more *moral Vertues*. We shall farther observe, that it is generally expressed, that the Reason why they were thus distinguished and favoured by God, was their being eminent Examples of Moral Vertue, that is, of solid and substantial Goodness. *Enoch walked with God*, that is, he kept his Commandments and pleased him, *and he was not, for God took him to himself to Heaven*, Gen. 5. 24. *Noah was a just Man, and perfect in his Generation, and Noah walked with God*; and being Righteous before God, he was preserved from the Waters of the Flood, which

which God sent to destroy Mankind for their Wickedness. *Job was a perfect Man, and upright; one that feared God, and eschewed evil.* Moses was very meek above all the Men that dwelt upon the Earth. Cornelius was a devout Man, one that feared God with all his House, who gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God always. I might have mention'd others, but these are enow to show you, that *Moral Vertue* is a necessary Part of the *Character* of a good Man, and that such only were favoured and beloved by God. The Character of *Cornelius*, Acts 10. 1. is made up of the *less weighty*, as well as the *more weighty Matters* of the Law. The Truth is, they ought never to be separated, but always go hand in hand. Generally speaking, those who conscientiously practise the necessary and essential Parts and Duties of Religion, are seldom wanting in those that are less necessary. When it is otherwise, one has Reason to fear some Defect or other. But then, on the other Hand, it is too often seen, that many shew great *Zeal* for the *external Duties* of Religion, who are *remiss* and *negligent* in the *necessary* and *substantial* Duties thereof. I am inclin'd to think, that one Time or other most People are convinced, that they ought to do something in Religion; many therefore being unwilling to reform and amend their
Lives,

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Lives, take up with that which appears to be less uneasie and troublesome to them, vainly and foolishly imagining, that they can, by their being zealous in *little things*, compound with Almighty God for omitting the *weightier Matters* of the Law. But if these People would make use of the noble Faculties God has given them, and not abuse the common Grace of God, they could not well avoid being convinced of this dangerous Error. For it is plain, not only from the whole Tenor of Scripture, but from the Reason and Nature of Things, that God requires us to mortifie our Lusts, to govern our Passions, to be regenerate, and become new Creatures, and to practise universal Holiness and Goodness, seriously endeavouring, in the whole Course of our Lives, to resemble and imitate him, who made us to be happy. And all other Duties are of no further Value, than as they serve to bring about these great and glorious Ends. This is necessary to our being in any good Degree happy in this present State. This was practised, as you have heard, by the Saints and Servants of God in the several Ages of the World, who were eminent for their Faith, and whose Works proved that their Faith was true and genuine, and pleasing to God; this made them dear to God, and beloved by him. And this is indispensably necessary to our having

ing a reasonable and well grounded Hope of being made for ever happy in the Enjoyment of him in his Presence and Kingdom. For Heaven is the *Portion only* of the *sanctified*; accordingly the Purport of St. *Paul's* Commission to the Gentiles was, to *open their Eyes, to turn them from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God*; and those who were thus turn'd and chang'd, were to *receive Forgiveness of Sins, and Inheritance among them that are sanctified thro' Faith in Christ Jesus*, Acts 26. 17, 18. The same Apostle tells us, that *we are saved and called with an Holy Calling; that we are chosen to Salvation, thro' Sanctification of the Spirit, and Belief of the Truth*. We see then, my Brethren, that it is indispensably necessary to practise the *weightier Matters* of the Law, as well as those of *less Moment and Concern*. If we omit them, we shall be sentenced by the Saviour and Judge of Angels and of Men, as Hypocrites; and we cannot then hope for a better Portion than that which is appointed for them.

I will not so far suspect the Judgment, or the Attention of this Honourable Assembly, as to spend Time in proving, that the Obligation to practise these most excellent and comprehensive Duties; Judgment and Justice, Mercy and Fidelity, extends to all; that it lays hold of every one, from the Honourable Judges on the Bench, to the meanest Officers in the Court;

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Court; that besides the Obligations common to all, those who appear as Witnesses, or serve on the Juries, will have a farther Tie upon them from the solemn Oath they are to take. If they shall therefore suffer themselves to be influenced by Prejudice or Passion, by Interest or Friendship, or any corrupt Consideration, the one to bear false Witness, or the other to bring in a Verdict contrary to the Evidence before them, and their own Consciences; they offend not only against the great Law of Justice, but they moreover bring the Guilt of Perjury on their own Heads.

To draw towards a Conclusion. Let what has been deliver'd, effectually prevail with us to set about doing the *whole Will* of God. As on the one Hand, we must not neglect the Means of Religion, so on the other, ought we not to rest in them. Let us therefore diligently set about the mortifying our Lusts, and governing our Passions: Let us seriously endeavour to *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God*; so shall we be hereafter called, and admitted to Glory, Honour and Immortality, in his Presence and Kingdom for ever; which that we may all be, God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the Sake of Jesus Christ; to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be ascrib'd all Honour and Glory both now and for ever.



F I N I S.

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